

Washington, DC – 12th District Georgia Congressman John Barrow (D-Savannah) released the following statement today about his vote against the Iraq supplemental appropriations bill:

“A month ago I voted against the President’s proposed troop surge because I believed it was the wrong plan at the wrong time. I have similar concerns about the proposal to require a mandatory timeline to withdraw U.S. troops over the next 17 months.

“I support most of what’s in this bill. For example, the bill includes an increase in funding for the war in Iraq and Afghanistan by even more than the President requested, as well as more funding for veterans healthcare. The bill also brings about some badly needed accountability in how the war is being managed – something that’s been missing for the past four years. It requires that soldiers be given the rest they need between tours of duty. It limits their time in Iraq to no longer than one year per tour. And it mandates that our troops be fully trained and equipped before they go into combat.

“The President says that we have no business tying his hands in any of these ways. That’s exactly why the bill gives him the discretion to waive any of those standards. It just requires that he explain his reasons for doing so. That’s the kind of accountability that we haven’t had in this war so far, and our troops deserve no less.

“Another good thing about the supplemental is that it demands accountability on the part of our allies. For four years now the President has told the Iraqi government, in effect, ‘The less you do, the longer we’ll stay.’ This bill changes that message to, ‘The more you do, the longer we’ll stay.’ That’s the message we ought to be sending the Iraqi government, and it’s a message we shouldn’t be afraid to send in the clear.

“What I could not support in the bill was the mandatory timeline for withdrawal. If this bill were to become law, it would require that our commanders in the field comply with a specific plan of battle 17 months from now – a plan of battle that was written in a law 17 months before. No one knows what will happen in Iraq 17 months from now. But if things were to turn out so that the President, a majority of the House, a majority of the Senate, and a majority of the American people all wanted to give our commanders the discretion to continue, this bill would literally take a new act of Congress to do so. And a new act of Congress could be blocked by a determined

minority in the Senate. That's no way to fight a war.

"I'm concerned that money for critical domestic and national security programs are included in a war funding bill, even though those programs don't relate to the ongoing war effort in Iraq and Afghanistan. The bill includes stopgap funding for Georgia's PeachCare program, overdue disaster relief for farmers, money for aviation and port security, and better security at nuclear facilities. These are all important issues that the last Congress failed to address, issues I've fought for, and issues that ought to have passed on their own.

"Some have claimed that these measures were intended as 'sweeteners' to influence the votes of members of Congress on what is essentially a war measure. I don't know any member of Congress whose vote on the war can be bought by linking it to any other spending measures, no matter how urgent. Certainly not mine.

"As the bill moves to the Senate, I'm confident that the timelines will be removed – and optimistic that PeachCare funding and agriculture disaster relief will get to the President for his signature."

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